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## **From overtourism to sustainability: A research agenda for qualitative tourism development in the Adriatic**

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*This paper discusses the nexus between economically-driven tourism development and broader societal aspects of social, cultural and ecological sustainability. The paper argues that similar to the discussion on the limits to growth in industrial development that started in the 1970s, the currently debated phenomenon of overtourism calls for a parallel discussion in tourism development. Similar to the argument that industrial development needs to be driven by qualitative, not quantitative growth, tourism development has to reorient itself away from the goal of ever-increasing tourist arrivals towards broader objectives of socially, culturally and ecologically sustainable qualitative growth. This argument leads to two policy implications. First, policymakers should consider which forms of tourism to encourage and which ones to discourage. Second, tourism policy should set incentives and disincentives accordingly. Institutional approaches from human geography can serve to analyze the prospects of these incentives and disincentives, and insights from behavioral economics such as the nudging approach can serve to shape policies accordingly. The paper takes the cases of two cities on the Adriatic sea, Venice and Dubrovnik, as examples.*

Keywords: tourism development, overtourism, qualitative growth, institutions, behavioral economics, Venice, Dubrovnik

JEL codes: D93; L83; Q56; Z32; Z38

## **Introduction**

For decades, the primary rationale in tourism development was increasing the numbers of tourist arrivals to a destination. In recent years, however, a phenomenon commonly called “overtourism” has attracted increasing public attention. In some highly popular tourist destinations, public resistance against large crowds of tourists and their behavior has emerged. Mediterranean cities such as Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik (Bruckner et al. 2017; Koens, Kostma and Papp 2018; Muler Gonzalez, Coromina and Galí 2018; Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato 2018) are often cited as salient examples for the phenomenon, but smaller, non-Mediterranean cities such as Salzburg or Hallstatt in Austria (Bruckner 2018; Bruckner et al. 2017; Neuhold 2019) have become the subject of the same debate.

Given these changes in perception, it seems as if the dominant rationale in tourism development is breaking down. Pure quantitative growth, measured in terms of tourist arrivals to a destination, is not seen as a desirable goal by populations any more. The inherent lack of ecological, cultural and social sustainability of permanent quantitative growth in the levels of tourist arrivals in destinations with a limited carrying capacity (Muler Gonzalez, Coromina and Galí 2018), coupled with the secular growth of global tourism, the boom of cruise tourism, and the emergence of low-cost carriers, seem to have shattered the previous consensus. While the debate is ongoing, it seems plausible that destinations burdened with unsustainable quantitative growth in their levels of tourist arrivals will have to engage in more activist and sustainable tourism development. Instead of promoting the destination to attract more tourists, policymakers and practitioners will have to consider how to steer tourist flows away from the most crowded hotspots, how to select the kinds of tourism desired (e.g. in terms of low ecological impact or high local value added), and to eventually limit quantitative growth.

However, doing so is difficult for political reasons. As long as there is a constituency in favor of quantitative growth (e.g. entrepreneurs in the tourism sector), there will be political pressure not to change the course of tourism development – even in cases such as Venice where the unsustainability of quantitative growth of tourist numbers in a spatially sharply delimited, non-expandable and particularly fragile old city is obvious and might eventually threaten the old city and its cultural heritage. Differing interests held by tourism entrepreneurs, sustainability advocates, and the wider population in overtouristed destinations

make it hard to achieve a new consensus and take time although threatened old cities such as Venice cannot afford to wait for long.

This paper argues that achieving a new consensus in favor of qualitative and sustainable tourism development in overtouristed destinations requires new policy approaches that are best applied in collaborative policymaking fora. These fora that in many cases exist (e.g. cluster initiatives or tourist associations) or have been proposed a while ago (e.g. tourism improvement districts) are not in and by themselves sufficient to promote the emergence of a new consensus. Policies to be applied in these fora will have to be institution-sensitive (Benner 2017) and directed at institutional change (Glückler and Lenz 2016). In addition, steering tourist flows and changing tourist behavior in desired ways may be achieved by building on recent insights from behavioral economics such as nudging theory (Amir and Lobel 2008; Hall 2013; Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

The paper is structured as follows. First, the paper discusses the problems associated with the overtourism phenomenon and the formerly dominant rationale in tourism development focused on permanent quantitative growth in the levels of tourist arrivals and does so by taking the Adriatic cities of Venice (Italy) and Dubrovnik (Croatia) as examples. Then, the paper takes a closer look at the problems in promoting the emergence of a new consensus in favor of qualitative and sustainable tourism development along the dimensions of organizations, policies, institutions and behavior. The paper concludes by proposing a research agenda to improve our understanding of how institutional and behavioral approaches could help in designing and applying policies to promote qualitative as well as socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable tourism development.

### **Overtourism: the problem of quantitative growth**

According to Koens, Postma and Papp (2018: 2), overtourism can be defined as “an excessive negative impact of tourism on the host communities and/or natural environment.” However, Koens, Postma and Papp (2018) emphasize that the term “overtourism” emerged in public discourse and describes phenomena that were discussed in the scholarly literature long before the term became popular, with the debate on harmful effects of tourism going back to the 1960s. In this sense, on a theoretical level the recent debate on overtourism and, more generally, on the cultural, social and environmental sustainability deficits of permanently growing mass tourism is nothing new. What is new, however, is that the possibly damaging



effects of permanent quantitative growth of mass tourism are acknowledged by the wider public and thus, by extension, eventually by parts of the relevant policymaking communities. For decades after World War II, the dominant rationale in tourism development was to increase the numbers of tourist arrivals to destinations, and to do so by promoting and marketing destinations in the (mass) tourism market and by expanding scalable tourism infrastructure. In the wake of the public debate on overtourism in overcrowded Mediterranean destinations such as Barcelona, Venice or Dubrovnik, the previous consensus that focused on continued quantitative growth in terms of tourist arrivals has broken down. While often in policymaking communities, in alignment with the local or regional tourism sector, quantitative growth remains a primary objective in tourism development, public opinion in heavily touristed cities (and in some rural regions) has become more skeptical towards the extent of tourism concentrated there, and probably even more so towards the prospects of further quantitative growth.

Public skepticism is related to the growing acknowledgment that notwithstanding its economic benefits, mass tourism comes at a considerable cost in cultural, social and environmental terms. Even more so, localized economic benefits can be very limited in some of the market niches driving overtourism such as cruise or bus tourism while the burden on the populations and ecosystems of destinations such as Venice or Dubrovnik is heavy. Generally, the overtourism phenomenon is characterized by a situation where the quantity and type of tourism prevailing exceeds the destination's carrying capacity, leading to damages in the destination's social, cultural or environmental fabric. However, it is important to stress that carrying capacity and thus, overtourism is not only a matter of numbers but also of behavior of tourists and further factors going beyond a purely quantitative perspective of carrying capacity. For example, Koens, Postma and Papp (2018: 2) stress that aspects such as "visitor behavior, timing, concentration, location, experience with tourism, local etiquette" add to the pure numbers of tourism arrivals in causing culturally, socially or environmentally unsustainable forms of mass tourism (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 2-3, 5; Muler Gonzalez, Coromina and Galú 2018: 278-9).

Further, technological developments shape tourist behavior and may hence lead to unwanted consequences. Social media can make tourists flock to areas that lack the necessary infrastructure, thus increasing the harmful effects of overtourism there. For instance, "the advent of Instagram and other social media has meant that unplanned tourism to these

locations can increase (e.g., if they are mentioned by a popular influencer)" (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 5-6). Furthermore, changes in tourist behavior that add to the quantitative burden of overtourism include visitors' quest for authentic experiences that leads them to penetrate ever deeper into the parts of a destination outside of tourist hotspots or even into private or semi-private spaces of residents, as well as the impact of cruise tourism with its strongly harmful environmental effects (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 6-7).

The possibly damaging consequences of overtourism include rising costs of living and housing (not least through the use of sharing-economy platforms) and real-estate speculation that might eventually bring about gentrification, congestion of transport infrastructure, a deterioration of local residents' identification with place, the loss of a destination's authentic character, substantial harm to cultural or environmental heritage, or a privatization of spaces that are supposed to be publicly accessible, and hence segregation (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 2-4; Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato 2018: 375; Panayiotopoulos and Pisano 2019: 7-9).

More specifically, Koens, Postma and Papp (2018: 5) summarize annoyances caused by overtourism in the 13 European cities they surveyed. Annoyances perceived by stakeholders include congestion of hotspots and transport infrastructure, inappropriate visitor behavior, e.g. through noise or drinking on the notorious "beer bikes", the emergence of touristic monocultures and the concomitant loss of authenticity through "touristification" of the retail and restaurant scene in hotspots, gentrification and displacement of residents as well as a sense of insecurity through housing being rented to tourists through sharing-economy platforms, and environmental degradation through waste and air pollution as well as intense water use (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 5-6).

The old town of Venice is one of the most prominent examples of the actual damages caused by overtourism. Due to the ecological sensitivity of the lagoon, the old city and its immediate surroundings represent an ecosystem very much endangered not only by increasing crowds of visitors but also by the type of tourism prevalent, notably cruise ships crossing the lagoon (Bruckner et al. 2017; Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato 2018).

The Croatian coastal city of Dubrovnik is the other salient example for the damaging effects and problems related to overtourism on the Adriatic sea. Due to the popularity of its old town, the boom of cruise tourism, and the impact of the widely known television series "Game of Thrones" shot in part in Dubrovnik, quantitative growth of tourism has led to overcrowding and to what Panayiotopoulos and Pisano (2019: 7) call an "overtourism

dystopia" related to "the paradox of tourism risking to destroy the very thing that tourists come to see" (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano 2019: 7). Policy responses include attempts to limit the number of tourists admitted to the city and to limit the capacity of cruise ships permitted to call at the city's port (Bruckner 2019; Bruckner et al. 2017; Panayiotopoulos and Pisano 2019).

When taking a look at these two examples from the Adriatic, it seems plausible to assume that the longstanding rationale of tourism development, promoting quantitative growth as measured in the number of tourist arrivals, will have to give way to a new vision. Without achieving sustainable and less damaging forms of tourism with a better balance between economic benefits on the one hand and social, cultural and environmental side-effects on the other hand, overtouristed destinations such as Venice and Dubrovnik will either lose their environmental balance (notably in the case of Venice) or their authenticity and livability (probably in both cases), or both. Paradoxically, without a change in the dominant rationale of tourism development, Venice and Dubrovnik, and certainly a number of other destinations, are likely to lose what makes them attractive to tourists in the first place, that is, the unique and authentic character of their environmental and cultural heritage.

The argument that the longstanding quest for quantitative tourism growth will have to end because of its inherent lack of sustainability is reminiscent of the debate on the limits to growth in industrial development kicked off in 1972 by the Club of Rome's seminal report (Meadows et al. 1972). Looking back to the past decades since the early 1970s, it seems safe to assume that the former consensus on the desirability of quantitative, resource-intense and therefore unsustainable growth in manufacturing has broken down in the wake of the "limits to growth" debate. While in a number of industrialized countries, parts of the policymaking communities still adhere to a philosophy of quantitative growth, in the academic sphere and among populations (notably in European countries) the idea of qualitative, balanced and sustainable economic growth instead of pure quantitative industrial growth has become widely acknowledged.

The current public debate on overtourism could eventually play a similar role than the Club of Rome's 1972 report and the debate that kicked off in its aftermath. At least in leading tourist destinations marked by the harmful effects of overtourism, the previous consensus on the desirability of permanent quantitative tourism growth for the sake of maximizing economic benefits of tourism without fully considering possibly damaging side-effects on the

social, cultural and ecological environment has come under intense pressure from civil society and local populations. To safeguard the economic benefits of tourism, shifting the focus of tourism development towards qualitative growth and drawing on market segments with higher localized value added and lower social, cultural and environmental impact will be necessary to balance the economic effects desired such as generating localized value added, tax revenues, and employment with the social, cultural and environmental sustainability indispensable in the long term.

However, for policy to shift its focus from quantitative to qualitative growth will be difficult to achieve. Again, the political debates on the nature of growth in the manufacturing sector going on until today provide an illustrative example of how difficult changing political mindsets can be even under obviously pressing problems such as climate change. While, in the exemplary cases of Venice and Dubrovnik, steps to contain the most harmful forms of overtourism such as cruise tourism could be curbed by quick and decisive regulatory interventions, policymakers often find it difficult to make hard decisions in the wake of political pressure from vested interests within the tourism sector. Desirable as radical but controversial policy decisions and regulatory action might be in these cases, shifting the policy focus from quantitative to qualitative tourism development through participatory forms of decisionmaking and by focusing on longer-term institutional and behavioral change may be more promising.

The next section introduces institutional and behavioral approaches that could be useful to facilitate the shift from quantitative to qualitative tourism development, and discusses the nexus between policies, organizations, institutions, and behavior by stressing the rôle of collective tourism policymaking and implementation fora, and by hinting at policy options to be developed in these fora.

### **Promoting qualitative growth: policies, organizations, institutions, behavior**

Since overtourism is a complex and multilayered phenomenon specific to the context at hand (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018), countering it is necessarily a multidimensional effort that can be analyzed along the dimensions of policies, organizations, institutions, and behavior.

## *Policies*

Possible policy responses to contain the harmful effects of overtourism in destinations such as Venice and Dubrovnik include limiting quantitative growth and combating excessively damaging forms of mass tourism such as cruise tourism, bus tourism, or low-cost carriers. However, putting quantitative limits to tourism development has to confront the legitimate questions of how to safeguard the economic benefits of tourism that are often needed in Southern and South East European economies and that, after all, provide for the livelihood of large numbers of entrepreneurs, employees, and their families. While sustainability advocates from civil society, environmental activists, and parts of the population of overtouristed destinations may call for putting hard quantitative limits to tourism, needs for economic development require more comprehensive and sensitive policies that try to balance economic benefits with long-term sustainability by promoting qualitative growth. Radical policies not sufficiently comprehensive and sensitive risk lacking either effectiveness or acceptance, and maybe even complicity, within the tourism sector.

The case of Dubrovnik is interesting because of policy interventions designed to limit the number of visitors including a cap on the number of visitors admitted to the old city (Bruckner 2019; Bruckner et al. 2017; Panayiotopoulos and Pisano 2019: 7). The latter step seems radical and effectively leads to the privatization of public space, a phenomenon one can criticize from a cultural and social point of view. It is remarkable that these policy interventions try to cure the symptoms of overtourism without dealing with the causes. Limiting the number of visitors or cruise ship tourists does neither change tourist behavior nor lead to more sustainable, culturally and ecologically more sensitive tourism, or higher local value added. Doing so would require the policymaking community, in collaboration with the tourism sector, to identify the segments or niches of the tourism market most in line with sustainable long-term development, and to promote these niches (e.g. agritourism, cultural tourism, culinary or wine tourism, or multi-day stays in small, family-owned hotels) with targeted policies while discouraging less attractive and more harmful forms of mass tourism with low local value added and a more damaging ecological footprint such as cruise tourism. While containing the latter would be easy to achieve by strictly limiting permissions for cruise ship calls and prohibiting calls by larger cruise ships, these steps are likely to encounter resistance by vested interests from within the tourism sector.

The political difficulties related to countering overtourism is obvious in the case of Venice. Cruise ships passing through the lagoon and even close to San Marco stimulate political pressures "to redirect the passenger traffic, but the business community in the City of Venice is keen to ensure the direct flow of tourists to the centre is not disrupted by regulation" (Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato 2018: 375).

Indeed, since the economic benefits as well as the burden of tourism are not spread evenly across different strata of the population in a destination, tourism development cannot be isolated from wider stakeholder and citizen participation as well as from power relations and the role of vested interests notably from within the tourism sector (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 3). This argument calls for participatory policymaking fora because the precise problems resulting from overtourism are highly context-specific and hence can be addressed through inclusive stakeholder involvement (Koens, Postma and Papp 2018: 10). Indeed, participatory models of tourism policymaking do exist and are widespread. These models include explicit or implicit tourism cluster initiatives, tourism associations, or tourism improvement districts, and provide frameworks for upgrading tourist destinations in terms of their competitiveness.

### *Organizations*

Due to the phenomenon that the tourism industry tends to cluster (Benner 2013; 2017) which is after all one of the underlying factors enabling overtourism, cluster policies have been applied to tourism (e.g. Kachniewska 2013). Cluster initiatives as typically formalized fora for collaboration between agents in the tourism value chain can be used to promote collective upgrading processes. Due to the public-good character of a tourist destination, collaboration between public and private agents is necessary (Benner 2013: 9; 2017: 6; Kachniewska 2013: 40). Often, the measures taken under the umbrella of cluster initiatives in tourism (as in other sectors) refer to the supply side and may include collective training schemes, joint marketing efforts, or entrepreneurship promotion measures (Benner 2013; 2017: 7-9).

However, collaboration between public and private agents in tourism upgrading schemes may suffer from a free-riding problem due to the public-good character of the primary tourism product, the destination in its entirety (Benner 2013: 9; 2017: 6). Because of this free-rider problem, purely "soft" measures such as promoting networking and collaboration or raising awareness for competitive upgrading needs will not be sufficient where investment is needed. In this case, "hard" policy interventions will be needed as a complement. Tourism

improvement districts are a vehicle to combine collaboration between public and private agents with compulsory funding through private agents' contributions (Assli 2009).

Organizationally, local or regional tourist associations can perform functions of tourism cluster initiatives or tourism improvement districts. The Austrian tourism associations can serve as an example. These associations are public-law entities established by provincial (*Bundesland*) law and have the mandate to promote tourism in their defined district. Tourism-related businesses located in the association's district are by law members of the association and have to pay compulsory membership fees, basically a quasi-tax, to fund the associations' activities in upgrading the tourist destination.<sup>1</sup>

These fora for collaboration provide an umbrella that can be useful for addressing problems resulting from overtourism, for agreeing on visions and strategies towards qualitative growth, and for funding the investments needed to implement these strategies. Yet, it is important to stress that tourism cluster initiatives, tourism improvement districts, or tourism associations in the first place provide frameworks that do not predetermine the issues addressed or the policies designed and implemented within them. So far, these frameworks were used to address first and foremost issues of competitive upgrading. From an economic point of view, doing so makes sense because of the collective nature of competitive upgrading efforts in tourist destinations (Benner 2017: 6-7; Kachiewska 2013: 40). Addressing wider societal issues based on more complex and possibly conflicting rationalities than purely economically motivated competitive upgrading will probably prove much more complicated. Still, collaborative policy design and implementation fora such as the ones introduced above can prove useful for doing so.

Indeed, one may argue that collaborative fora provide the most suitable frameworks for addressing aspects of long-term social, cultural and environmental sustainability. However, doing so requires these fora to be inclusive and to consider views beyond the vested interests of the tourism business they represent. Public policy will have to play the role of facilitator in an inclusive process of dialogue between the tourism sector and other societal groups such as sustainability advocates and environmental activists. Even in cases where membership in tourism cluster initiatives, tourism improvement districts, or tourism associations is limited to

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<sup>1</sup> Specifics vary from province (*Bundesland*) to province. For instance, in the case of Carinthia, the province's tourism contribution law (*Kärntner Tourismusabgabegesetz*) defines a tax tourism business have to pay into the provincial budget while the province's tourism law (*Kärntner Tourismusgesetz*) states that tourism associations can require their members to pay compulsory special contributions to fund specific tourism-related projects.

tourism-related businesses, policymakers can draw on these collaborative fora to stimulate a wider societal dialogue by setting incentives for inclusive dialogue formats between the members of these fora and other societal groups, and thus promote an open debate on how to overcome problems of overtourism and promote qualitative growth in a given tourist destination. Doing so under the umbrella of inclusive, participatory policymaking fora makes sense because developing and anchoring a new shared vision towards qualitative tourism development requires stakeholders from the tourism sector and from civil society to acknowledge the legitimacy of each others' interests in the first place. Stakeholders from different sides will have to acknowledge that tourism is an important generator of economic benefits such as value added, revenue, and employment, and that at the same time, the harmful social, cultural and environmental effects of tourism have to be minimized both for the sake of the tourism sector's long-term prospects and for wider societal needs. Embarking upon an inclusive and collaborative dialogue, vision-building, and strategy development and implementation process is a way to achieve such a consensus. Yet, for such a process to succeed, paying attention to institutional patterns is important.

### *Institutions*

In discussing avenues for qualitative tourism development under the umbrella of collaborative policymaking fora, agents will have to consider the institutional context (Glückler and Bathelt 2017) found in their specific tourist destination. Institutional approaches known from human geography can be useful in identifying and discussing institutional patterns enabling or constraining sustainable upgrading. Institutions can be seen as "ongoing and relatively stable patterns of social practice based on mutual expectations that owe their existence to either purposeful constitution or unintentional emergence" (Bathelt and Glückler 2014: 346). Institutions differ from both organizations and prescriptive rules, the latter understood as codified embodiments of policies such as laws and regulations. Institutions can change either through purposeful design by policymaking called downward causation or through micro-level agents changing their behavior, a process dubbed upward causation (Bathelt and Glückler 2014).

Prescriptive rules, and thus policies, and institutions are intertwined through a set of interactions as classified by Glückler and Lenz (2016). Understanding and identifying these relationships is important because they condition the effectiveness of policies. For instance, policies establishing institution-competing rules face low chances of success. In contrast,



institution-circumventing rules may be used to promote upgrading processes (Benner 2017; Glückler and Lenz 2016).

However, the nature of these relationships is not set in stone because institutions can eventually change through processes of downward or upward causation. When designing and eventually implementing policies in collaborative fora such as tourism cluster initiatives, tourism improvement districts, or tourism associations, agents will have to identify institutional patterns behind the established forms of quantitative tourism growth that have led to the overtourism phenomenon such as lacking awareness for long-term sustainability, myopic business strategies and planning horizons, or persistent expectations towards business-as-usual quantitative growth among tourism entrepreneurs. When pondering policies for shifting the focus towards qualitative growth, the consistency of rules to be established by policy with prevailing institutional patterns will have to be considered. For instance, under institutional conditions such as a lacking awareness for sustainability needs or business-as-usual thinking, policy incentives towards qualitative growth may prove difficult to implement because tourism entrepreneurs may expect a continuation of policies promoting quantitative growth, and exert political pressure accordingly. Establishing a new vision built on the necessity of long-term, socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable qualitative growth will be necessary, as will be efforts to identify promising avenues to seize the eventual economic benefits of pursuing such a vision, e.g. through targeting attractive market segments with high local value added, higher cultural consistency and social compatibility, and lower environmental impact such as, for instance, agritourism, ecotourism, culinary tourism, wine tourism, or cultural tourism drawing on smaller, locally-owned hotels, making visitors stay longer in the destination, and thus possibly offsetting eventual reductions in the number of tourist arrivals.

The collaborative fora introduced above can provide suitable frameworks for establishing such a vision and for agreeing on policies inducing downward causation of institutional change. At the same time, agents working together in these fora might lead to upward causation of institutional change by modifying agents' behavior, establishing mutual trust, and enabling the emergence of a new consensus (Benner 2018). These behavioral changes and the resulting modified institutional patterns can possibly increase the prospects of agents working together to develop a commonly shared vision towards qualitative growth and to sincerely address problems of overtourism and to elaborate and realize possible solutions.

### *Behavior*

Because overtourism causes social, cultural or environmental problems not only because of high and increasing numbers of tourist arrivals but also because of tourists' behavior leading to social or ecological damage to destinations (Muler Gonzalez, Coromina and Galí 2018: 279), policy responses aiming at limiting the number of tourist arrivals, if and when promising at all, are not sufficient to counter the actual or threatening damages caused by overtourism. In addition to steering tourist flows, stimulating behavioral change on behalf of visitors is necessary.

The nudging approach provides policy with the rationale "to steer citizens towards making positive decisions as individuals and for society while preserving individual choice" (Hall 2013: 1098). To do so, nudging exploits consumers' "cognitive biases" (Hall 2013: 1098) by establishing a "choice architecture" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) that sets incentives for individuals to make socially desirable choices (Amir and Lobel 2008: 2115).

In overtouristed destinations such as Venice and Dubrovnik suffering not only from high levels of tourist arrivals but from harmful behavioral patterns of tourists, designing and implementing nudging strategies can provide a useful tool that can be addressed in collaborative policymaking fora such as cluster initiatives, tourism improvement districts, or tourism associations. For instance, nudging possibilities include shaping pre-set options for visitors making choices of what places to visit (e.g. when designing the conditions of entry or transport tickets), immediate feedback mechanisms to visitor behavior, design and placing of signs, or targeted hints to norms or reciprocity (Thaler and Sunstein 2008; Hall 2013: 1099). However, precise actions for nudging visitors to steer tourism flows and lessen undesired behavior have to be identified and agreed on case by case due to the specifics of each destination and its context, as well as the precise problems related to overtourism to be solved.

While nudging cannot solve the basic and underlying lack of sustainability of quantitative tourism growth leading to harmful phenomena of overtourism in destinations such as Venice and Dubrovnik, it makes sense to combine regulatory action and institutional change interventions with nudging to steer tourist flows and shape visitors' behavior. In so doing, some of the annoyances of overtourism can be alleviated.

### **Towards a research agenda for qualitative tourism growth**

The present paper argued that the phenomenon of overtourism, although a complex and multilayered one with a high degree of specificity in each destination affected, can be seen as a wake-up call for tourism policy to shift its focus away from quantitative growth as measured in rising levels of tourist arrivals towards qualitative growth through more sustainable forms of tourism with lower social, cultural, and environmental impact. The economic rationale under such a new vision should be to maximize local value added instead of maximizing the number of tourist arrivals, and at the same time keeping the social, cultural, and environmental footprint of tourists low enough not to endanger the social fabric, cultural heritage, and environmental ecosystem of a given destination. This objective can be achieved not only by focusing on less harmful forms of tourism and by limiting drivers of unsustainable quantitative growth such as cruise or bus tourism, but will have to be complemented by inclusive and collaborative policy design and implementation to change prevailing institutional habits towards qualitative growth, and by targeted strategies to steer visitors' behavior through nudging.

Achieving a new model of tourism development built on sustainable and qualitative growth is critically related to the role of organizations and public-private governance. Participatory policymaking fora such as tourism cluster initiatives, tourism improvement districts, or tourist associations may serve the following four purposes:

1. Creating a vision towards qualitative growth and required upgrading efforts in terms of competitiveness in promising market segments with high local value added as well as in terms of social, cultural and environmental sustainability;
2. Mobilizing the investment needed for competitive and sustainable upgrading;
3. Discovering prevailing institutional patterns, discussing them openly, and identifying needs and measures for institutional change through downward causation, and in so doing, possibly bringing about institutional change through upward causation and behavioral change on the part of agents (Benner 2018); and
4. Discussing, agreeing on and legitimizing “hard” regulatory action such as regulations banning undesirable visitor behavior and putting in place quantitative limits to harmful phenomena such as rapidly growing cruise or bus tourism.

On the basis of the arguments presented, there is a need for further research in several directions. We need to better understand the nature of rule-institution interactions in the tourism sector. These interactions are likely to be highly specific to individual overtouristed destinations. Venice and Dubrovnik offer highly interesting cases for further research in this direction. Empirical case study research designed to analyze institutions governing tourism supply and demand in these destinations will certainly sharpen our understanding of the institutional foundations of the overtourism phenomenon there, and may eventually suggest possible recommendations for a wider range of places.

Further, a better and more detailed understanding of nudging possibilities in tourism in general and in destinations suffering from unsustainable overtourism specifically is needed. While experimentation by policymakers and practitioners in designing and applying nudging strategies adapted to the idiosyncratic local context will most likely prove useful, scholarly attention should turn to developing a theory of nudging in tourism that might lead not only to recommendations for tourism policymakers and practitioners in regional or local destinations but also to macro-level policy implications or to possible actions to be undertaken by translocal or transnational agents such as tour operators. On the local scale, empirical and experimental research on nudging in tourist hotspots may lead to important insights.

Given the prevalence of harmful consequences of overtourism in Adriatic destinations such as Venice and Dubrovnik, the status of the Adriatic sea as a major tourist destination close to large European markets, and the fragility of the Adriatic's environmental ecosystem and cultural heritage, there is an urgent need to consider the long-term sustainability of tourism to this particular macro-region to safeguard its long-term survival not just as a tourist destination but also as a sensitive environmental ecosystem and locus of cultural heritage. For these reasons, focusing part of the research streams suggested above on Adriatic tourist destinations would be worthwhile and relevant.

Summing up, it is safe to say that for heavily touristed destinations such as Venice or Dubrovnik, the formerly dominant objective of raising the levels of tourist arrivals has to give way to a new narrative of selecting and promoting desired forms of tourism with higher local value added and lower social, cultural and environmental effects. While other destinations may not (yet) feel the burden of overtourism, focusing solely on quantitative tourism growth is a questionable objective in the first place. Paying close attention to the long-term social, cultural and environmental sustainability of a growing tourism sector is a necessity for

tourism policymakers everywhere. Adapting the logic of the post-1972 “limits to growth” debate to tourism by focusing on qualitative tourism development is thus a shift in attitude that should bring about a new generation of tourism policies not just in crowded Adriatic or Mediterranean cities, but also in other, still less-visited destinations seeking to avoid the harmful effects of overtourism from the beginning.

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